



Manchester Sound: The Massacre by Polly Wiseman
Presented by [Library Theatre](#) , Directed by Paul Jepson
At a *secret* venue in the Northern Quarter
Reviewed by [Fat Roland](#) June 2013

Justin Bieber is on a trip. It's a trip to the visitor's book in Anne Frank House. He writes a comment that she "would have been a belieber". It causes an international storm. The entire universe resolves never to mesh historical tragedy with modern pop culture ever again.

Understandably, then, the **Library Theatre**'s latest project has raised a few eyebrows. Their final production during their geographical exile is a site-specific performance that clashes the horrific killing of Protesters in **Peterloo in 1819** with

the pill-chugging, day-glo culture of
1989 rave Britain

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Manchester Sound: The Massacre

a Bieber moment? Or do two very different protests against their current world orders have a similar story to tell?

This is how Manchester Sound worked. On a grey evening, we were herded into a car park and harangued by young ravers asking for drugs and offering us fanzines for 50p. Leggings, smiley faces, lots of gum and plenty of gumption. We were led to the ***Manchester Sound venue***, which is easy to find: it's down the street next to thingies, I forget the name, you know, the one with the windows. And once inside, we were transported to another world. Truly. The set design offered delight after delight, the sound staging was deceptively clever and the stark reality of the plot was emphasised by beautiful lighting. We walked from an utterly convincing rave scene into a bawdy 19th century pub, with everybody in the place bustling around the set like confused extras while, in a wonderful sleight of hand, the actors quick-changed from character to character without us noticing. The play seemed built around us. They leaned on us, spoke to us, screamed at us. I even scored drugs off a DJ.

Scenes were interspersed with moody video montages courtesy of the Olivier award-winning **Timothy Bird**

, and perhaps that offered a televisual point of focus throughout, but with the performance so in-your-face, it was difficult to make an objective judgement of the event. With actors above you, beside you and sometimes at your feet, I doubt there were two people that had the same experience. Very postmodern.

